

Message Text

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CONFIDENTIAL ABIDJAN 3072

PASS USIA FOR IAA MCGINLEY

E O 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, AFSP, IV
SUBJ: CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT HOUPHOUET-BOIGNY, APRIL 18
I - ARRANGEMENTS FOR NEW CULTURAL CENTER

REF: ABIDJAN 3073

1. IN VIEW CERTAIN DIFFICULTIES RECENTLY ENCOUNTERED IN OBTAINING GOIC APPROVAL FOR A NEW CULTURAL CENTER IN COCODY, AS WELL AS FOR USING A RENTED VILLA IN THAT AREA FOR AN INTERIM CENTER, I REQUESTED AN AUDIENCE WITH PRESIDENT HOUPHOUET, AND WAS GRATIFIED TO RECEIVE AN APPOINTMENT WITHIN 24 HOURS.
2. ACCORDINGLY, ACCCOMPANIED BY THE PAO, I CALLED THURSDAY AT 1700 HRS ON THE PRESIDENT AT HIS COCODY RESIDENCE. I BRIEFLY OUTLINED THE PAST HISTORY AND UNDERLYING MOTIVATIONS OF USIS' SEARCH FOR A NEW CENTER IN COCODY, AND EXPRESSED OUR DISAPPOINTMENT THAT THE MINISTRY OF CONSTRUCTION HAD AT THE LAST MINUTE RAISED OBJECTIONS TO BUILDING OUR CENTER ON THE SITE PROPOSED BY THE PARA-STATAL CONSTRUCTION FIRM SICOGI. I ALSO POINTED OUT THAT UNTIL WE RECEIVED OFFICIAL APPROVAL FROM THE FOREIGN MINISTRY OF OUR INTENTION TO USE THE VILLA IN COCODY AS A TEMPORARY CENTER, WE WERE NATURALLY RELUCTANT TO SIGN A LEASE, AND, MORE PARTICULARLY, TO PAY ONE YEAR'S ADVANCE RENT.

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3. PRESIDENT HOUPHOUET SHOWED HIMSELF EXTREMELY SYMPATHETIC TO OUR PROBLEM. HE IMMEDIATELY GAVE PERMISSION FOR US TO USE THE VILLA AS A TEMPORARY CULTURAL CENTER. HE ALSO EXPRESSED HIS APPROVAL OF OUR INTENTION TO LOCATE CENTER PERMANENTLY IN COCODY AND PROMISED PERSONALLY TO LOOK INTO THE SICOGI PROJECT THE FOLLOWING DAY. HE INDICATED THAT IF FOR SOME REASON THE SICOGI LOCATION WAS NOT FEASIBLE, HE WOULD MAKE ANOTHER SUITABLE SITE AVAILABLE TO US. HE ALSO EXPRESSED A STRONG INTEREST IN MAINTAINING AND STRENGTHENING IVORIAN CULTURAL RELATIONS WITH OTHER NATIONS -- NAMELY, THE US, FRANCE, GERMANY AND CANADA.

4. COMMENT: MY DECISION TO SEEK AN AUDIENCE WITH HOUPHOUET SO SOON AFTER PRESENTLY MY CREDENTIALS -- ESPECIALLY FOR THE PURPOSE OF REQUESTING HIS ASSISTANCE -- WAS OBVIOUSLY NOT TAKEN LIGHTLY. IT WOULD APPEAR, HOWEVER, THAT BY ADDRESSING OURSELVES DIRECTLY TO THE PRESIDENT WE HOPEFULLY HAVE CUT THROUGH A GORDIAN SNARL OF RED-TAPE AND INTRA-GOVERNMENTAL JEALOUSIES THAT THREATENED TO SERIOUSLY DELAY, IF NOT TOTALLY BLOCK, THE ALREADY DRAWN-OUT PROJECT OF RELOCATING OUR CULTURAL CENTER.

SMITH

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